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ABSTRACT

The turn of the century will signal a profound change in the composition and character of the leadership of community colleges. Future leaders will have in common with their peers in the private sector a global perspective and a mastery of technology seldom seen in today's leaders. More of them will be women, minorities, and immigrants. Beyond changes in skills, sex, and race, however, future leaders must be characterized by a compelling moral vision for the community college and by the ability to build communities. Their vision will be based on an understanding of the social and economic climate of the community college and the institution's potential for change and renewal. Building communities will require the ability to articulate this vision, assume a role in community leadership, and create a functioning team aligned in pursuit of a common goal. Meeting the challenges implicit in building communities necessitates: (1) educating boards of trustees and presidential search committees about the tasks of leadership in the new era; (2) modifying the approaches of graduate schools and internal leadership development programs to include nontraditional management skills; (3) building receptivity to women and minorities in leadership positions among boards and staff members; and (4) educating internal constituencies about consensus building, teamwork, information sharing, and shared decision making. New leaders and new forms of leadership will gradually transform the colleges into genuine communities. (ALB)

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LEADERS FOR A NEW CENTURY

Ruth G. Shaw

March 30, 1989

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Leaders for a New Century

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March 30, 1989

Ruth G. Shaw

The year 2000 marks not only the beginning of a new century, but the dawn of a new millenium. For the community college movement, 2000 is the first century anniversary for the initial associate's degree, awarded by the University of Chicago in 1900. The turning of the century has become a benchmark, a time-target toward which we aim our efforts at change and renewal. Only eleven years hence, the year 2000 looms dauntingly near for those who will lead community colleges in the new century. If the Report of the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, Building Communities, truly represents a vision for that new era, then we have miles to go before we sleep, or promises we will never keep.

Consider a peek into the typical community college president's office, circa 1989.

The president leans back in his chair, reflecting, his pink skin a little flushed from the rapid walk from the parking lot. He began his career by teaching, albeit briefly, in a community college. He is proud of the Ed.D. he earned, which has helped his administrative career move ahead rather rapidly. He has worked his way up through the administrative ranks, and he is certain his previous position as chief academic officer helps him understand the instructional programs thoroughly. He is proud of maintaining a certain distance from faculty and staff -- and surprised that "aloofness" was found to

be a significant trait in a recent study of effective college presidents. (The Effective College President, 1988). He prides himself on his college's service to local business and industry. And like many of the business leaders in his Rotary Club, he is suspicious of the "global economy" and fairly certain that the students in his voc/tech programs are receiving all the general education they will ever need. There is a microcomputer on a table in the corner, but he works faster using the telephone and the dictaphone. Yes, he reflects, he has just reason to feel proud. The college has served well. It has been responsive to identified needs. He has avoided controversy and kept the college out of sticky situations in the community. He has done a good job, taking charge, moving ahead, accepting the faculty cheap shots that criticized him as too autocratic. After all, he is paid to make decisions -- and he has made them.

Now look into the community college executive office of the twenty-first century. The first surprise is the five-person office, a team approach to leadership that recognizes the president as primary, the "first among equals." Lone executives have become increasingly rare in community colleges where building communities is the central mission. The job is too complex, the pace of change too rapid for one person to handle. All the team members who serve in the office of the president are leaders, with diverse talents. They differ from each other in sex, in skin color, in cultural background, in a hundred obvious ways. All were drawn to the community college because of their belief in the institution as a central force for educational, civic, and cultural renewal. Their educational backgrounds are varied, but they share strong credentials in the liberal arts and social sciences. All are well-traveled, often to visit their overseas training sites for American companies. They

cannot imagine the college without its array of educational and managerial technology. They use their work stations easily and efficiently, tucking portables in briefcases to stay in touch with each other and the college. Though they have vast information at their fingertips, they are intuitive in their decisions, too, consulting freely throughout the college, and through their networks of colleagues and community members, respecting the judgments of faculty members, front line staff, and students. The president's suite of the twenty-first century community college is a microcosm of community, drawn together by invisible strands of shared vision and values, expressed through a competent, caring team whose leaders have much in common with their followers.

Each scenario indulges in some hyperbole, which is, after all, nothing more than exaggeration in the service of truth. But each is built on a foundation of fact or firm forecast.

The division that prevails between community college faculties and administrations is all too real. A Carnegie Foundation survey found two-thirds of community college faculty describing their college administration as "autocratic" -- a description of disenfranchisement that is a far cry from the sense of community spelled out for the next century. The routes to the contemporary community college presidency are fairly predictable and narrowly defined -- a preparation that will surely be inadequate in a century where connection, integration, and breadth of perspective are paramount. Today, fewer than 200 of the 1200 plus community college presidents are female or minority. The demographics of the twenty-first century suggest far more representation by these groups. College "responsiveness" will not be good enough for the future. Anticipation of needs, based on both data and intuitive judgment, will be the requirement for

successful community colleges. And the "team approach," which may seem the most outlandish notion in the future scenario, is already taking hold in corporate America. In 1984, fully 25% of American companies, including such giants as Corning Glass, reported using such an approach. (The Wall Street Journal, February 27, 1989, A1 and A9).

Are contemporary community college presidents laughably outmoded, anachronisms to be pitied, censured, and above all, changed? Certainly not. Most of us are engaged in an exciting and challenging transition, as leaders and followers adjust to a different environment with dramatically different requirements for community colleges and for those that would lead them. I, and many of my colleagues, may be far more like the present-day president than like the team leaders of the future. But there is a strong sense that past will not be prologue for community colleges in their second century. Only such a belief could account for the acceptance and support of the Building Communities report.

This report, in my view, borders on the revolutionary in its assumptions and in its proposals. Yet it has not sparked harsh debate or acrimony. It marches a number of long-venerated sacred cows to the slaughter, and finds acquiescence in response. Consider the call for common academic calendars and general education course numbers for community colleges and four-year colleges. I have heard battles rage over such issues for hours that seemed like days. Then there is the modest proposal for an expanded core curriculum in technical programs, and the call for an international perspective in that core. If those ideas do not raise some blood pressures, there is the proposal to spend 2% of instructional budgets on professional development, the recommendation that civic service programs for students be initiated, and the

startling notion that faculty unions be included in some aspects of governance. Some community college presidents, in their heart of hearts, would disagree profoundly with specific suggestions and fundamental values of this report. But its acceptance as the order for a "new day" suggests that though there may be disagreement, today's leaders accept the premise that more diversity, greater teamwork, stronger emphasis on breadth of perspective and integration of learning, and a deeply held commitment to building community will be essential to the next century.

One cautionary note: the beautiful verbiage of the report, peppered with the familiar buzz words of "partnership," "alliance," "equality," "vision," "inspiration," "renewal," "coherence," "connection," "commitment," and "collaboration," may have elicited merely conditioned responses from those who consumed the contents too casually. Who could oppose such sentiments? But this vision calls for more than casual confirmation of idealistic clichès. To struggle with the deep meaning of this report, to penetrate the paradigm shift that it requires, is to understand what will be required of the leaders for the new era -- and to understand the transitional struggle which faces today's leaders.

Building Communities advances these key premises:

1. "Community colleges and the nation's future are inextricably interlocked." (p.49).

2. The influence of the community college as a social institution "must grow outward from a core of integrity and confidence firmly rooted in humane goals." (p.49).

3. By going beyond the needs and interests of individuals, community colleges can enable their constituents to strengthen their understanding of common goals and to build educational and civic relationships that will help our country become self-renewing. (p.6).

4. The college must be a model community if it is to advocate community to others. (p.7).

5. "At the center of building community there is teaching, ... the heartbeat of the educational enterprise." (p.7-8).

If we accept these premises, the characteristics of leaders for a new era are clearer. Community college leaders will have in common with their peers from other sectors a global perspective and a mastery of technology seldom found in today's leaders. More of them will be women, minorities, and immigrants. At the 1988 League for Innovation Executive Leadership Seminar, these shifts were already evident. Of thirty "maybe wanna-be" presidents, twelve were women; five were African American; two were Hispanic; one was Indian. This mix is radically different from the current population of community college presidents. Beyond skills, sex, and skin color, however, lie the less observable and critically important capacities of leaders who can deliver on the challenge of building communities. Neither the possession of certain key management skills nor the fact of being female or minority implies the ability to build communities.

The New Leaders

It is one thing to give lip service to diversity; it is entirely another to nurture it, to encourage the sometimes quarrelsome differences it spawns. It is one thing to speak of vision; it is quite another to give it voice when the course of a college and a community is on the line. It is pleasant to provide a forum for community debate on non-controversial issues of importance; it is unsettling to see the visceral struggle for community acted out on campus. It is easy to speak of building consensus -- as long as you

know you are in charge. To encompass both continuity and change, to inspire and to empower, to build trust and, above all, to strengthen community -- these are the challenges for leaders in the new era.

Community colleges surely have sustained our central sense of mission and purpose as the "people's college." But the criticism from within our ranks and from outside them that we have tried to be "all things to all people" points less to a deviation from mission than to a loss of the common threads that bind our diverse programs. Just as corporate America has sometimes succumbed to fragmentation, temporal market forces, and a short-term view, so have community colleges sometimes lost the longer view and the firm sense of place in our country's social and economic fabric. Those who can give voice to the common threads, those who have that firm sense of place -- they will be the leaders of the twenty-first century.

Whether we call them "transformational leaders," as does James MacGregor Burns, or seek the "renewers" described by John Gardner, or find our foothold in the "servant leadership" espoused by Robert Greenleaf, the leaders who can build community will surely be motivated by a compelling moral vision for the community college. Their vision will be built on a deep understanding of the social and economic context of the community college and its potential as an agent for change and renewal. The drive to serve, rather than to satisfy individual ego, will be more important to these leaders.

The American Leadership Forum, a non-profit organization founded in 1981 by Joseph Jaworski to nurture leaders in public service, suggests these capacities for those who would "build community:"

1. They must be able to create and articulate a vision representing the highest aspirations of the community served.

2. They must recognize their role as societal leaders, truly hearing a "call to serve" their communities constructively.

3. They must have a deep understanding of the singular power of a group aligned in pursuit of a common goal, and thus must be able to create a team marked by trust and caring, a shared vision, and the ability to work together.

4. They must balance data-based reason with intuition, or the judgment and foresight to "know the unknowable," a key requirement for leaders in a world where ambiguity and rapid change reign supreme.

5. They must have a firm belief in the art of the possible, a future orientation marked by contagious enthusiasm and confidence that deep commitment can eliminate obstacles. (ALF, Changing the Face of American Leadership, n.d.)

Such leaders have the capacities to build and renew communities, to shape the future through the promise and potential of the community college.

The Challenges

It is relatively easy to develop a mastery of technology, even to develop a global perspective. But how are we to develop such nebulous, intangible capacities in our leaders for the new era? Aren't these new traits really so much psychobabble mumbo-jumbo? And wouldn't the old linear models, with their straightforward approaches to power and control, be faster and easier to teach? Easier to teach, perhaps, but the old models simply do not reflect the way a more diverse, more rapidly moving, more information-sharing twenty-first century will work.

Those who will be leaders through the 1990's may well face the most difficult transition, as they juggle the old expectations for paternalistic omniscience from their boards, their followers, and their publics with the

growing expectations for consensus-building teamwork from the very same constituencies. It will not be an easy time, as similar changes occur in politics and government, in private and public sectors alike. The immediate availability of information to people on the "front line" calls for a very different distribution of power from the days when the president guarded information and was a sole source for fast, accurate answers. No one else had access to the facts. Knowledge is power, and the very different way of sharing information (if not knowledge) in community colleges will inevitably change their leaders. Likewise, the increasing heterogeneity of our population, and the increasing power of various special interests make collaboration and coalition-building central to success.

The challenges are formidable. Not the least of them is educating boards of trustees and search committees about the leadership tasks of the new era. Most boards of trustees emphasize the conventional in their searches, adhering to the known, fearing the inevitable instability that the unconventional leader will create. There are exceptions, to be sure, as my own experience at Central Piedmont Community College illustrates. In that case, a diverse board of men and women, black and white, took a calculated risk by choosing a thirty-eight year old woman with a clear emphasis on teamwork and consensus-building to replace the founding president, who had enjoyed enviable successes by using a very different style of leadership. It is a risk that few boards are willing to take.

Likewise, graduate schools, internal leadership development programs, and various forums and seminars must modify their approaches. The management skills on which such programs have traditionally focused will be necessary, but surely not sufficient foundations, for the new leaders. To their credit,

many of these programs, particularly those supported by the Kellogg Foundation have emphasized the preparation of women and minorities for leadership positions. Perhaps greater attention to building receptivity to such leaders by boards of trustees would help assure the diversity the new era requires. Beyond this suggestion, however, the programs might learn from the approach of the American Leadership Forum. Its year-long program begins with a wilderness experience that concentrates on goal setting, visionary leadership, self-analysis, consensus-building and the nature of leadership. Here is a description of the outcome: "On the mountain, participants rethink their notions of gender, race, class, and politics. They make great leaps of faith and land on solid ground. They discover the strength that comes from giving power away. They build personal stamina. They learn about each other and about themselves. Following this experience, the group members meet regularly for reading, discussion, role-playing and reflection on leadership. The Forum concludes with a practicum project designed to address a specific community concern and to test the abilities of group members to:

- create a compelling vision by imagining and sharing worthy, attainable goals;
- draw together people of diverse interests and achieve intended results;
- build supportive environments which encourage risk taking;
- effect needed change and manage resulting conflict;
- think creatively, strategically, and systematically;
- reaffirm values by living them (ALF, Changing the Face of American Leadership, n.d.).

Such an approach has promising applications for community college leaders. We cannot continue doing more of the same, using yesterday's effective leadership

theories and role models as the vision for a very different tomorrow. The definitions for effective leadership are undergoing a sea-change, and our leadership programs must be in the vanguard of that change.

Changes in followers are too often ignored as we concentrate on the leaders for the year 2000. Despite our understanding of resistance to change and our knowledge of change strategies, we sometimes forget that internal constituencies, including administrators, faculties, staff, students, and trustees are sometimes strangers to consensus-building, teamwork, the sharing of information, and the changing locus of responsibility for decision-making. The new strategies are sometimes perceived as weakness or uncertainty by those conditioned to a take-charge, authoritarian, hierarchical leader. And women and minorities are particularly vulnerable to such perceptions. It is far from a "given" in many communities and institutions that the new approaches are preferable to the old. A dramatic redefinition of roles and responsibilities occurs when the leadership strategies change as markedly as they inevitably will in many of our community colleges. As we prepare our new leaders, we must help them understand the value shift and the educational process that may lie ahead as they "transform" their colleges into genuine communities.

We must groom the leaders for the new era, and we must find ways to develop very different capacities in presidents who have been effective using traditional approaches. Many of us will continue to serve well into the twenty-first century. By supporting each other, by risking, by sharing the bold new vision of building communities, we will begin to make that vision a community college reality.

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